



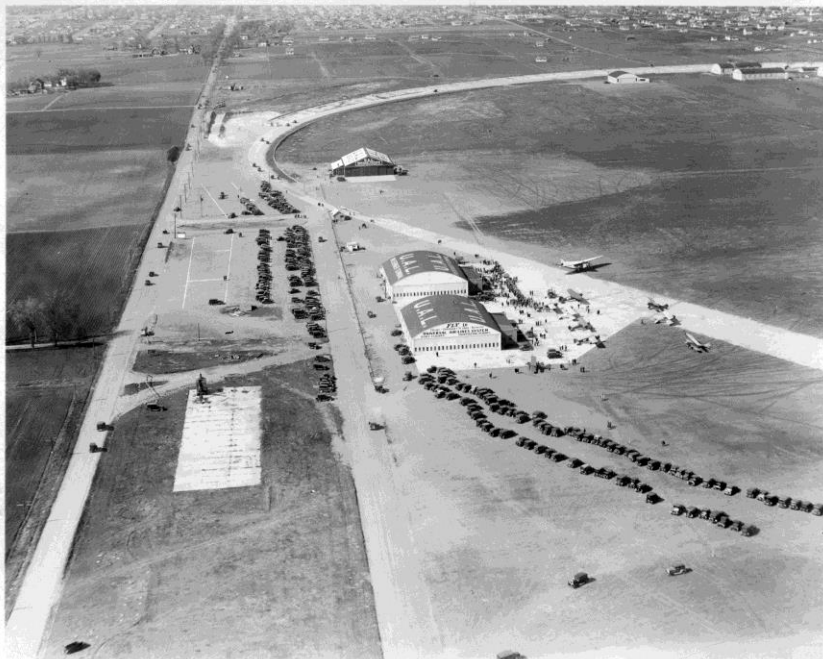
## Civil Engineers: Designers and Builders of the Quality of Life

### HHC's Spotlight on Minnesota Air Transportation

Reprint of past article by Paul D. Schimnowski, M.ASCE

For this article, we focus on the history of air transportation and airports in Minnesota. Where was the first landing strip? Why is it called Wold-Chamberlain Field? What problem in the Alaska Territory was solved at Minnesota's first airport? Is Minneapolis-St. Paul International airport (MSP) in Minneapolis or St. Paul?

In 1910, a year and a half after the Wright Brothers made flight history; Glenn Curtiss staged the first public airplane flight in the Twin Cities in a 14-minute exhibition flight over the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. Just after the United States entered World War I in 1917, training flights began at a 580-acre farm north of Minneapolis owned by Earle Brown. Following the war, aviation-related businesses operated from fields scattered throughout Minneapolis and St. Paul. In 1915, the Twin Cities Motor Club built a 2.5-mile auto speedway in the area of what is now MSP International Airport. The unsuccessful racetrack was soon closed and in 1920, the dirt area in the center of the track became a landing strip. The 325-acre field was named Twin Cities Airport-Wold Chamberlain Field in 1923 in honor of two Minnesota aviators, Ernest Wold and Cyrus Chamberlain, who were killed in action in France in World War I.



Aerial view showing hangars and Universal Air Lines buildings before speedway track completely removed. MN Historical Society Photo



By 1930, the runways were sod, but a concrete taxiway area had been installed in front of the new hangars and terminal building. A procedure of rolling and compacting the snow in winter to mark the landing strips became so successful that requests for details of the procedure came from all over the United States and as far away as the Alaska territory.

In 1948, the airport acquired its present name – Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport-Wold Chamberlain Field. Massive reconstruction of airport facilities in the early 1960s included the construction of a new main terminal, a maintenance base and headquarters for Northwest Airlines. An upgraded and enlarged runway system and modern equipment have further enhanced airport safety, efficiency, and environmentally responsible operations. Highway access to and from the airport, as well as parking facilities, have also been improved. Today the airport covers 3,400 acres.

Although it works closely with surrounding communities, the airport is not part of any city. It is a separate, autonomous, self-supporting entity that reports directly to the Legislature. The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) owns and operates MSP and six reliever airports in the metropolitan area including: the St. Paul Downtown Airport (Holman Field), Flying Cloud Airport, Airlake Airport, Lake Elmo Airport, Crystal Airport, and Anoka County-Blaine Airport.

With nearly 37 million people to move and over 500,000 aircraft takeoffs and landings to handle every year, civil engineers have been asked to create efficient, safe, and creative solutions to the air transportation demands of the public. Because of the technically challenging and innovative work that civil engineers continue to do, we all have the opportunity to enjoy the infrastructure around us.